

2020 was one of the deadliest gun violence years on record, and we are already on track to outpace those grim statistics. More than 21,000 people are dead in just the first 6 months of this year.

We need to step up to the plate and do something to protect our constituents.

We need to make straw purchasing and gun trafficking Federal crimes. We need to expand background checks. We need to support more evidence-based community violence prevention programs. We need to build opportunity for youth to get a good education and good jobs. We cannot go on letting mothers bury their children.

This week, we mark the end of Gun Violence Awareness Month. But for far too many families, there is no end to this month of awareness and advocacy. These families are painfully aware of the impacts of gun violence because they carry the weight of this epidemic with them every single day.

I rise to implore my colleagues to exercise some courage and responsibility by advancing gun violence prevention legislation.

MEANING OF INDEPENDENCE DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, a quick web search on the meaning of Independence Day will give you the dictionary definition: A day celebrating the anniversary of national independence.

For a nation built upon the foundations of freedom, such as the United States of America, there is much more to the meaning of Independence Day than can be described in a dictionary.

For Americans, Independence Day is about the people who have lived and died in the defense of freedom. Crispus Attucks, who was killed by British troops in the Boston Massacre, has long been honored as an American hero and the first casualty of the Revolutionary War. Mr. Attucks has proved to be the first in a long legacy of American heroes.

Each and every generation of Americans has had their share of men and women willing to pursue a more perfect realization of that most basic of human rights, freedom.

Freedom against tyranny was the primary motive during the Revolutionary War for our first President, George Washington, alongside the Founding Fathers, who designed the government for our new Nation and the troops who fought for its right to exist.

The great efforts of President Abraham Lincoln during the most trying time in our Nation's history, the Civil War, led armies of brave soldiers who fought not only for the reunification of the country but also the freedom of people held in slavery.

This noble fight was taken up not only by soldiers but by civilians who

worked in support of those in combat, such as Clara Barton, Army nurse and founder of the American National Red Cross.

Hundreds of thousands of young men lost their lives during the Second World War fighting fascism in Europe and around the world. Presidents Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Harry Truman, alongside generals including Eisenhower, Patton, and MacArthur, provided the leadership and strategy necessary to allow our soldiers to gain victory and preserve freedom.

As a nation, we have believed in and fought for freedom for so long that it can easily be taken for granted. This is a trap that we must be extra vigilant not to fall into. As President Reagan aptly stated, freedom "is not passed to our children in the bloodstream."

Pursuing freedom for over 200 years has been the result of a conscious choice, in each era, by every generation. We must continue to make that choice in this era and in this generation.

Mr. Speaker, you may have noticed that in my examples from the Revolutionary War, Civil War, and Second World War, I named politicians who served our soldiers and citizens. Make no mistake, it is the soldiers and the citizens of our Nation who do the work to preserve freedom. Therefore, it is the solemn duty of those of us who work in government to lead and represent the people so that they can continue to live in freedom.

I urge each and every government official, and especially my fellow Members of Congress, to make the choice to pursue freedom, as so many generations have before us. In this way, we honor the lives of past heroes such as Crispus Attucks and ensure freedom will be defended by future generations.

Mr. Speaker, that is the meaning of Independence Day that could never fit in a dictionary.

HONORING HEROES GORDON BEESLEY AND JOHNNY HURLEY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. PERLMUTTER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Mr. Speaker, on June 21, 2021, the community of Arvada, Colorado, experienced a tragedy. In a matter of minutes, our community lost two heroes, with dozens of Arvada residents left stunned and horrified.

Arvada Police Officer Gordon Beesley was responding to a report of suspicious activity in Olde Town Arvada when he was ambushed and shot by a man who had immense hatred toward the police.

Minutes later, a Good Samaritan named Johnny Hurley intervened and shot the suspect, undoubtedly saving countless other lives. In a tragedy upon a tragedy, Hurley was then mistaken as the shooter, and he was killed.

Officer Gordon Beesley joined the Arvada Police Department in 2002 and

served in a number of roles for the department. He spent most of the year working as a school resource officer at local schools in our community, including Oberon Middle School, Lincoln Academy, and Excel Academy Charter School. During the summers, he often returned to patrol work, as he was doing last Monday in Olde Town Arvada.

Officer Beesley was a well-known and well-liked member of our community. His calm, gentle, and patient demeanor made a big difference in his day-to-day interactions with students, especially those students who needed it most.

In 2015, he was named employee of the year by the city of Arvada after the city learned Officer Beesley was riding his bike to school multiple times a week with a student who suffered from developmental delays and was not able to ride by himself.

Countless other stories have surfaced from students, his colleagues, and community members in the days following his death about the impact he had on their lives, big and small.

He was an accomplished drummer and singer who played in local Arvada bands Railbenders and Brethren Fast.

We will remember Officer Beesley's kindness and bravery and the approach he brought to life each and every day to "make someone feel special today."

Hearing gunshots, another hero stepped up to protect and defend the community, 40-year-old Denver resident Johnny Hurley. According to Arvada's chief of police, Johnny's actions were "decisive, courageous, and effective in stopping further loss of life."

Johnny's friends and family remembered him as an idealist and iconoclast and were not surprised to learn Johnny stepped up to defend his community in a time of need.

The loss of Johnny Hurley is tragic. I join the Arvada Police Department and our community at large in honoring his bravery for his actions that day, which undoubtedly saved lives.

Although we don't know all the facts, our hearts go out to the officer who mistook Mr. Hurley for the shooter.

This has been a difficult week for our community, including for members of the Arvada Police Department. Our heroes in uniform are charged with protecting our communities, and last week's shooting is a reminder of the dangers our police officers face each and every day across the country.

Olde Town Arvada is a close-knit community at the heart of Arvada. On a typical day, it is a busy, vibrant, cheerful part of town. Mr. Speaker, June 21, 2021, was a dark day for our community, and it is difficult for many of us to process it.

My deepest and heartfelt condolences go out to the families of Officer Beesley and Johnny Hurley and the entire Arvada community. Arvadans are resilient and strong. Together, we will get through this.